Native language interference in Bangladeshi students’ use of articles in English essays

A comparison of Bengali medium and English medium schools

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En jämförelse mellan skolor där undervisningsspråket är bengali respektive engelska

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Pages: 38

Abstract
The impact of the first language on the second language has long been a vibrant and controversial issue in terms of second language acquisition. The impact or influence happens when learners learn a new language and transfer features from their native language to the new language. This paper investigates to what extent Bengali learners’ native language influences their use of articles in English as a second language and whether there is a difference depending on the language of instruction (Bengali and English, respectively). To do so 20 essays from two schools, i.e. a total of 40 learner essays were collected and examined. The results show that Bangladeshi English learners are influenced by the noun forms in Bengali and their ability to use English articles hardly differs according to the type of school they attend.

Keywords: Native language interference, language transfer, second language acquisition (SLA), English as a foreign language (EFL)

Abstract på svenska
Förstaspråkets inverkan på andraspråket har länge varit en levande och kontroversiell fråga när det gäller språkinlärning. Påverkan eller inflytandet sker när inlärare lär ett nytt språk och överför karaktärsdrag från sitt förstaspråk till det nya språket. Den här uppsatsen undersöker i vilken mån bengaliska elevers modersmål påverkar deras användning av artiklar i engelska som andraspråk och om det är någon skillnad beroende på undervisningsspråk (bengali resp. engelska). Materialet är 20 elevuppsatser vardera från två skolor, skola A (undervisning på bengali) och skola B (undervisning på engelska), dvs totalt 40 uppsatser samlades in och analyserades. Resultaten visar att bengaliska elevers engelska texter visar drag av substantivformerna som används i bengali, och deras elevernas förmåga att använda engelska artiklar skiljer sig inte åt i någon större utsträckning oavsett undervisningsspråk.

Nyckelord: modersmålsinterferens, transfer, andraspråkinlärning, främmandespråksinlärning,
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1. Introduction

When someone starts learning a second language or a foreign language, their native language often has an influence on the second language. This influence is known as native language interference on the target language. The role of the native language in second language acquisition is one of the most discussed and widely researched issues among other related issues of second language acquisition. When learning a second language, learners learn through steady accumulation of structural entities of the second language but may exhibit difficulties in organising this knowledge appropriately and coherently (Bhela, 1999:22). There appears to be a significant difference between the accumulation and the application of the knowledge. Second language learners have already mastered their first language(s). Empirical investigations have shown that where there are differences between the native language and the target language, the learners’ knowledge of their native language may interfere and hinder the second language learning, and where there are similarities between the native language and the second language, the learners’ knowledge of their native language will accelerate the second language learning (Ellis, 1985:6-7).

In Bangladesh, English is taught from primary to tertiary level and it is a compulsory subject in every grade in both primary and secondary schools. Being an eastern Indo-Aryan language, Bengali is a very different language from English, a Western-Germanic language (Klaiman, 2009: 417). Therefore, learning English as a second language is a challenge for most learners in Bangladesh. There are two major types of secondary schools in Bangladesh: i) Bengali medium schools, where the medium of instruction is Bengali and ii) English medium schools, where the medium of instruction is English. Those who study at English medium schools generally have good competence in English. As part of assessment, students in Bangladesh have to sit for English exams and their different level of mastery of grammar is reflected in their exam scripts. There might be many reasons behind the errors in written discourse by Bangladeshi learners and their competence of grammar might be more or less depending on their type of schools. This paper aims to explore the impact of their native language, Bengali, on Bangladeshi learners’ article use with English nouns. To be specific, the present study will focus on article use in Bangladeshi learners’ written English.

1.1 Aims

The main aim of this paper is to investigate whether there is any influence from Bengali on Bangladeshi students’ use of English articles in their written English and to see whether there is a difference between learners from two different types of schools. In order to examine this, written English examination scripts were collected from students in grade
seven at a Bengali medium school and an English medium school in Bangladesh. In conclusion, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What native language interference can be identified in Bangladeshi learners’ use of English articles in their English essays?
- To what extent can Bangladeshi students’ mastery of English articles be attributed to the type of school they attend?

2. Theoretical background

Every year, more than 7 million learners who study English as a second language enrol at secondary schools in Bangladesh, but not very much research has been carried out so far on the learners’ acquisition of English as a second language. To my knowledge, few such studies have been done on native language interference on syntactic and morphological structures in English written discourse by Bangladeshi learners from Bengali and English medium schools.

2.1 Approaches to errors in learner language

Much research has been done in the field of native language inference on second language acquisition and the study of native language inference in second language acquisition has undergone significant changes over the past few decades. Gass and Selinker (2001:65) claim that “the role of the native language has had a rocky history during the course of second language acquisition research.”

After the Second World War and up to the end of the 1960s, there was an assumption that most of the difficulties faced by a second language learner were due to his or her native language. It was assumed that differences between a native language and a second language would interfere with learning the second language, and similarities between the native language and the second language would accelerate learning the second language (Ellis 1985:6). Based on this belief, a procedure called contrastive analysis was developed in order to identify the areas of difficulty while learning any second language. Later, errors by second language learners were treated from a different perspective. The conceptualization and significance of errors took on a different role with the development of Error Analysis by the publication of an article by Pit Corder (1967) entitled “The Significance of Learners’ Errors” (Gass & Selinker 2001:78). Error analysis provided a wider range of possible explanations than contrastive analysis for dealing with errors. But it was not without deficiencies (Gass & Selinker 2001:79). Although error analysis classified, described and evaluated errors, it was a limited tool of investigating second language acquisition as it only provided a partial picture of second language learners’ errors (Ellis 1985:68; Gass & Selinker 2001:86).
Contrastive analysis and error analysis developed under the influence of behaviourist learning theory (that claims: language learning is a stimulus-response process and people learn by imitation), and the inadequacies of behaviourist explanations of L2 (second language) acquisition led researchers to look towards an alternative theoretical model. According to Ellis (1997:32-33), the new model, mentalist theory, and the concept of interlanguage, drew directly on mentalist views of L1 (first language) acquisition. A mentalist view of language means that language learning is an innate process and a first language is learnt by drawing on an innate grammar. Larry Selinker (1972) developed the idea of interlanguage (Ellis 1985:47). Interlanguage is a language in between the learner’s native language and the target language. When any learner is in the process of learning a second or target language, the language produced by the learners is called interlanguage.

In the following sections there will be a brief survey of the three approaches: contrastive analysis, error analysis, and interlanguage. Section 2.2 will explain how the approaches will be used from the perspective of this study.

### 2.1.1 Contrastive analysis

Contrastive analysis was developed and practised as an application of structural linguistics to study native language interference (Ellis 1985:23). Contrastive analysis is a way of comparing the learner’s first and second language to determine potential problematic areas for the purpose of selecting what needs to be learned and what does not need to be learned when learning a particular second language (Gass & Selinker 2001:72). The idea of contrastive analysis was first formulated by Lado (1957), who claimed that “those elements which are similar to [the learner’s] native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult.” Lado (1957:2) further claimed that

> Individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture- both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture, and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and the culture as practised by natives.

In contrastive analysis learning is viewed as habit formation. So when a learner is in the process of learning a second language the learner will transfer his/her habits of the first language; in other words, the native language will influence the learning of the second language. The more two languages and cultures resemble each other, the lesser the learning difficulties, and the more different two languages and cultures are, the greater the learning difficulties. Contrastive analysis predicts that when learners try to learn a L2, the linguistic structures and rules of L1 may affect their L2 learning. Contrastive analysis suggests what obstacles second language learners may confront while learning a second language.
Therefore, Lado (1957:2) believed that the teacher who has made a comparison of the second language with the native language of the learners will be able to identify the real problems and can adjust, update and modify teaching materials for them. So contrastive analysis had implications for language pedagogy.

Contrastive analysis claimed that all mistakes made by second language learners were consequences of influences from their first language (Odlin 1989: 17). In the 1970s, the prediction of Contrastive analysis faced serious challenges. Empirical research showed that not all learning difficulties arise from cross-linguistic differences and the difficulties that do arise cannot always be predicted by contrastive analysis (Odlin 1989: 17). For example, it is not unusual for a beginner of a second language to produce a sentence like (1):

(1) He comed yesterday.

In this sentence the learner uses the pattern of regular verbs on an irregular verb. However, there is no way to account for this fact within a theory based on learners’ tendency to transfer features and patterns from the native language to the second language. In 1984 Duskova gathered data from Czech speakers learning English and Russian. It was found that those learning English did not transfer bound morphemes, whereas the Czech learners of Russian did. In this case, transfer occurred in one instance but not in another, so this result could not be explained by contrastive analysis, which predicts errors only because of differences in the languages (Gass & Selinker 2001:74). Another criticism of the role of contrastive analysis was with the concept of difficulty. According to contrastive analysis, differences signified difficulty and similarity signified ease. From this point of view, difficulty was equated with errors. But difficult means hard to do, make or carry out and a difficulty does not always lead to errors. The following example is taken from Kellerman (1987:2), who had a student who wrote:

(2) But in that moment it was 6:00.

In a conversation with the student, the teacher wanted her to comment on her use of the preposition in. The student was sure that the correct form was in but questioned whether it should be it was 6:00 or it had been 6:00. So in this case, the learner was having difficulties with tense usage but there was no error that reflects that difficulty. On the other hand, there was no doubt in her mind about the correctness of the preposition. Hence, difficulty cannot be equated with errors, according to the prediction of contrastive analysis (Gass & Selinker 2001:75).
There are two forms of contrastive analysis: i) the strong form and ii) the weak form. The strong form claims that all second language errors can be predicted by identifying the differences between the learner’s second language and the learner’s first language. The weak form of the hypothesis claims only to be diagnostic. A contrastive analysis can be used to identify which errors are the results of inference. Thus according to the weak form or hypothesis, contrastive analysis needs to work hand in hand with another approach to analyse errors and that approach became known as Error analysis (Ellis 1985:24).

2.1.2 Error analysis

When Contrastive analysis was declared not able to clarify second-language learners’ errors, researchers began to look for another approach which was both theoretical and practical. This new approach became known as Error analysis (Odlin 1989:18). The application of Error analysis in SLA (second language acquisition) was established in the 1970s by Corder and his colleagues. Error analysis is a sort of linguistic study of errors made by the second language learners (Gass & Selinker 2001: 79). Errors are inevitable in language learning, whether it is first or second language. During the initial period of research on second language acquisition, errors were only viewed as output of imperfect learning. But Corder (1967) focused on the significance of learners’ errors and considered learner errors as important for the language learning process. In Corder’s view, errors are not only to be distracted and eradicated; rather they can be viewed as evidence of the learners’ progress and the procedures they employ in their cognition of any second language. Corder distinguished between errors of performance and errors of competence, which he referred to as lapses or mistakes and errors, respectively. Mistakes, which might happen due to tiredness, nervousness, stress or divided attention, are similar to slips of the tongue. The speaker who makes a mistake can recognize it as a mistake and can correct it if it is noticed. An error, on the other hand, is systematic, likely to occur repeatedly and not self-controllable (Corder 1973:258-259).

According to Corder (1973:265), error analysis has two objectives: one theoretical and one applied. The theoretical analysis of errors clarifies what and how learners learn while studying a second language. Teachers may make use of error analysis in their teaching, in that errors provide feedback and thus inform teachers about the effectiveness of teaching materials, techniques and what to do further. Along with the objectives of error analysis, the investigation of errors can be diagnostic and prognostic. Corder (1967) said that it is diagnostic because the investigation of errors holds the learner's status of a language at any particular point during the learning process. It is also prognostic because it instructs the teacher to update learning materials to cope with the learners' problems (Lengo 1995:20).
According to Gass and Selinker (2001:79), there are a number of steps for conducting an error analysis:

- Collection of data
- Identification of errors
- Classification of errors
- Quantification of errors
- Evaluation of errors
- Remediation

Corder (1973:278) classified errors on the basis of the difference between the learners’ utterance and the reconstructed version. He made four categories of errors:

- omission of some required element;
- addition of some unnecessary or incorrect element;
- selection of an incorrect element; and
- disordering of the elements.

Later, error analysis was criticised for its partial investigating nature. It focuses on only part of the language that learners produce. It examines language-learner language at a single point in time, but it does not focus much on the developmental route learners take (Ellis 1985:37). Critics also argued that to get the entire picture of a learner’s linguistic behaviour both errors and non-errors should be considered (Gass & Selinker 2001:80).

In 1974, Schachter did a study on written English compositions by native speakers of Japanese, Chinese, Arabic and Persian focusing on the use of English restrictive relative clauses (Gass & Selinker 2001:82). The numbers of correct and incorrect English restrictive relative clauses are given in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Native Language Group</th>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persian</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the number of errors is interpreted from an error analysis perspective the result would be that the Japanese and Chinese are more proficient in using English restrictive relative clauses than the Arabic and Persian speakers. But the analysis and results of Schachter’s study went beyond the errors to consider the total production of relative clauses, including error free relative clauses. Although it is obvious that the Persian and Arabic speakers had a greater percentage of errors than the Chinese and Japanese did, it is also a fact that the Chinese and Japanese produced only half as many relative clauses than the Persian and
Arabic groups did. The Japanese and Chinese form relative clauses by placing the modifier before the noun it modifies, as in the following examples (Gass & Selinker 2001:82):

**Japanese**

(3) Watashi-wa eigo-o hannasu josei-o mimashita
I (subj) English (obj) talks woman (obj) saw
I saw the woman who speaks English.

**Chinese**

(4) Wo kandao nei ge shuo ying yu de nuren
I see that speak English of woman
I saw the woman who speaks English.

Persian and Arabic relative clauses are similar to English in that the relative clause is placed after the noun it modifies, as in the following examples:

**Arabic**

(5) Ana raait al emraah allety tatakalem al-englizy
I saw the woman who speaks the English
I saw the woman who speaks English

**Persian**

(6) An zaenra ke inglisi haerfmizaene didaem
That woman that English speaks I saw
I saw the woman who speaks English.

The way of forming relative clauses in Japanese and Chinese is different from that of English, and the Japanese and Chinese speakers do not use the construction in English so frequently. When they use it, they use it carefully and with a high degree of accuracy. On the other hand, the Persian and Arabic learners use relative clauses in English more frequently and because of that there are more opportunities for errors. This study reveals something about the production of relative clauses in relation to the differences and similarities between the native language and the target language which would not be apparent through error analysis alone (Gass & Selinker 2001:82).

Another problematic area of error analysis is related to the source of errors. Within the framework of error analysis, the assumption is that errors can be categorized as belonging to one source or another. But an ambiguous error, like Terina not can go (produced by a Spanish speaker), can be interpreted as either an interference error because it reflects a Spanish structure or as a developmental error because it is also found in English-speaking children learning their first language (Gass and Selinker 2001:85).
2.1.3 Interlanguage

The term *interlanguage* was developed by the American linguist Larry Selinker, in recognition of the fact that second language learners have a linguistic system that is, in part, different from the learner’s first language and also different from the second language (Ellis 1997:33). According to Selinker (1972:201), “interlanguage refers to the separateness of a second language learner’s system, a system that has a structurally intermediate status between the native and target languages.” Alternative terms have been used by different researchers to refer to the same issue; Nemser (1971) refers to *approximate systems*, and Corder (1971) to *idiosyncratic dialects* and *transitional competence* (Ellis 1985:47). Ellis (1997: 33-34) lists the following features of interlanguage:

- Interlanguage is viewed as mental grammar
- Interlanguage is permeable
- Interlanguage is transitional
- Interlanguage is variable
- Interlanguage employs various learning strategies
- Interlanguage may fossilize

Interlanguage is a dynamic system that moves in the direction of the target language. As interlanguage is an intermediate system between the first language and the target language, it presents the gradual development of second language acquisition (Ellis 1997:33). According to Ellis (1997:35), the concept of interlanguage can be viewed as a metaphor of how second language acquisition takes place. He presented a computational model of second language acquisition like the one below:

\[
\text{input} \rightarrow \text{intake} \rightarrow \text{second language knowledge} \rightarrow \text{output}
\]

Ellis compared a learner’s second language production with the functions of a computer. The learner learns rules and patterns of the second language through implicit or explicit learning as input, which is processed in two stages. First, parts of it are attended to and saved into the short term memory. These are referred to as intake. Second, some of the intake is saved in the long term memory as second language knowledge. The process for making intake and second language knowledge occur in the learner’s mind is compared to the central processing unit of a computer. After being processed in the learner’s mind the received second language knowledge turns into interlanguage which is the written or the spoken output of the learner’s second language knowledge.
2.2 Relevance of contrastive analysis, error analysis and interlanguage in this study

Contrastive analysis is a relevant theory for studying native language inference of Bangladeshi students in their written English discourse because Bengali and English are two different languages and Contrastive analysis means comparing two languages to explore similarities and differences between two languages. Due to differences between Bengali and English, Bengali speaking students might make mistakes while writing in English. So Contrastive Analysis can be used to predict areas of potential errors made by Bangladeshi English language learners.

After contrastive analysis, error analysis is also a relevant theory that can be used in the present study. Error analysis aims to discover and describe different kinds of errors in an effort to understand how learners acquire any second language. Many errors made by second language learners can be detected better in terms of learners’ attempts to discover the structure of the language being learned rather than as an attempt to transfer patterns of their native language(s). So according to error analysis, different types of error like overgeneralization, simplification, omission, disordering etc. might be found in the written English discourse by Bangladeshi students.

Interlanguage refers to the separateness of a second language learner’s system, a system that has a structurally intermediate status between the native and target languages (Selinker 1972:201). The participants in the present study, Bangladeshi English language learners, have an interlanguage because as second language learners their language goes through sequences of development and their produced language is between native and target language. The subjects in this study might transfer their native language patterns to their second language writing. That is called interlingual transfer in terms of interlanguage. So interlanguage is a relevant theory for this study.

2.3 English teaching in secondary schools in Bangladesh

Over time, the Bangladeshi education system has gone through various phases. From the time of the English rule (1757-1947) to the Pakistani regime (1947-1971) and finally Bangladeshi rule, education has evolved not only in methods but also in fundamental aspects like medium of instruction and governance. The people of Bangladesh have been acquainted with English since the country was a part of the Indian sub-continent under the British rule (1757-1947). The use of English started in formal and institutionalized settings in Bangladesh through Macaulay’s Minute of 1835 that proposed English as an official language (Nesa
During the British period the medium of education was largely English. In fact, English was a second language in this area during that period. After the end of British tenure in 1971, English as a colonial legacy was pervasive in the educational, administrative, and social life in Bangladesh (the then East Pakistan) (Nesa 2004:8). After the liberation war in 1971, Bengali was made the national language in the country and Bengali replaced English in almost every sphere of the country. With the widespread use of Bengali, English lost its official status and dominance (Hasan 2004, Nesa 2004). But from the last decade of the 20th century, the importance of English as a lingua franca emerged in Bangladesh. English has been emphasized, prioritized and reintroduced at all levels of education. Education in Bangladesh now has three major stages - primary, secondary and higher education. Primary education is a 5-year cycle while secondary education is a 7-year one with three sub-stages: 3 years of junior secondary, 2 years of secondary and 2 years of higher secondary school. Higher secondary school is followed by higher (graduate level) education in different streams, requiring 5-6 years to obtain a Master’s degree (Bangladesh National Web Portal, n.d.). In the secondary education system, Bangladeshi students have the choice of three different types of school: i) Bengali medium, ii) English medium and iii) Religious education schools. Most of the students enrol in Bengali medium schools in Bangladesh. English medium schools are too expensive for people in general and only a few people who are deeply concerned with religion are interested in religious education. So, Bengali medium schools are the major venues for educating people in Bangladesh on the secondary level.

2.3.1 English teaching and learning in Bengali medium secondary schools of Bangladesh

In the mainstream Bengali medium secondary schools of Bangladesh, English is taught only as a subject. In spite of English being taught from the first year in Bengali medium primary schools, most of the learners are not very competent on entering secondary level. The National Curriculum Text book Board (NCTB) in Bangladesh is the responsible governing body for developing the curriculum, making the syllabus and publishing books for different classes in schools. NCTB claims that it introduces effective communicative techniques and provides adequate practice in language skills (National Curriculum & Textbook Board, Bangladesh, NCTB, 2012: 35). But the curriculum and syllabus are made in such a way that learners do not have the opportunity to practice the four skills of language: speaking, reading, writing and listening, in their classrooms. Formerly in Bangladesh, English was taught using the grammar-translation method and more emphasis was given to theoretical knowledge of English than its various functional and communicative aspects. Students were compelled to learn certain rules of language which did not enable them to use English as a means of communication. The feedback or evaluation process was also based on rote-
learning rather than practical learning (Nesa 2004:9). But in recent years, English is taught using a communicative approach. However, the effect of changing the curriculum and syllabus for English teaching is not powerful enough for learners’ proficiency in English to improve. Firstly, learners in secondary schools in Bangladesh are not motivated to learn English for communicative purposes. They consider English as a mere subject that they need to study to pass their exams. Secondly, the classroom activities are mainly confined to reading, learning grammatical rules and memorizing different topics for writing paragraphs or compositions in exams. Finally, most of the teachers do not have any ELT (English Language Teaching) training and those who received training cannot make proper use of their training because their teaching is hardly supervised; they tend to transfer the way they were once taught and their medium of instruction is Bengali. Many of the teachers themselves lack in spoken proficiency. The fault lies in their educational background because during the post liberation period of Bangladesh, the decision to make Bengali the only official language affected the general standard of English. So when the English teachers explain everything in Bengali in the classroom, the students are deprived of an opportunity of listening to and speaking in English (Ainy 2001: 115). The learners in secondary schools in Bangladesh learn the different grammatical rules of English but they do not practice in the classroom how to speak and write correct English using the rules. So, in the end their study of English mainly aims at passing school exams.

2.3.2 English teaching and learning in English medium secondary schools in Bangladesh

English medium schools at primary and secondary level in Bangladesh are mainly accredited by the British examination boards: Edexcel and CIE (University of Cambridge International Examinations). In English medium schools all subjects are taught in English using books written in English, except for the subject Bengali. In English medium schools, the instruction and interaction inside the class and school area are usually in English, which makes it possible for the students to acquire English faster with higher proficiency and accuracy. English medium schools in Bangladesh prepare their students to sit for “O” level and “A” level exams (Quaderi & Mahmud 2010:121). Before sitting for the “O” level exams the students have to study ten academic years starting from play group and two academic years more after the “O” level for the “A” level exams. In junior and mid level schooling the students study English language and literature with their schools’ own curriculum (Quaderi & Mahmud 2010:122). The schools develop an English curriculum for junior and mid level students as preparatory groundwork for the “O” level and the “A” level English courses. The students in English medium schools in Bangladesh have to use English as their medium of instruction as well as for communication. They use course materials written by western
writers. English medium school students tend to become very good at English (Haque & Akter, 2012:126). Hence, the students of English medium schools are expected to be proficient in using English.

2.4 Article use in English and its Bengali equivalents

One grammatical feature that is especially tricky to Bengali learners of English is the different noun forms and article use. In English, articles are used to modify nouns and are located before a noun or a noun phrase. Articles comprise the definite article the, the indefinite article an or a (an and a are variants of the same word, used before the noun depending on whether the noun begins with a vowel sound or not) and the zero article (Greenbaum, 1996:215). The choice of article depends on the reference, definiteness and number of nouns. The reference of a noun can be generic, specific, or unique. If a noun refers to a general class of something, rather than to a specific member of a class, the reference is generic. With generic reference, mass nouns and countable plural nouns take zero articles. For example:

(7) He likes wine/lakes/literature/sports.

However, prepositional post-modification by an of-phrase usually requires the definite article with a head noun. For example:

(8) He likes the wine/ the lakes/ the music of France.

With generic reference, countable singular nouns take either the indefinite article or the definite article. The definite article the is used with singular nouns, most often in technical and scientific writing to generalize about classes of animals, body organs, plants, musical instruments, and complex inventions. For example:

(9) The electricity is a marvellous invention.
(10) The tiger lives in the jungle.

The indefinite article a or an is used when a singular noun represents the entire group. For example:

(11) A tiger is a ferocious animal.

With generic reference, the definite article the is also used before non-personal abstract nouns, nationality words and phrases with adjectives as head. For example:

(12) The evil
(13) The French
(14) The rich
If a noun refers to a specific member or to several specific members of a general category the reference is specific. With specific reference, the zero article is used before most proper nouns and the definite article *the* is used before mass nouns, as well as singular and plural common nouns. For example:

(15) I like __John.
(16) *The* paper of Canada.
(17) *The* wines of France.
(18) John bought a TV, a tape-recorder and a radio, but returned *the* radio.

In example (15) *John* is the name of a specific person and it is a proper noun. So before this specific proper noun the zero article has been used. In example (16) the noun, *paper*, has been specified and the noun is mass noun. So before the specific mass noun the definite article, *the*, has been used. In example (17) the noun, *wines* is a specific noun. So before the specific plural noun, *wines*, the definite article, *the*, has been used. In example (18) *radio* is a specific noun which has been mentioned before. So before the singular specific noun, *radio*, the definite article, *the*, has been used.

With unique reference, the definite article, *the*, is used before certain proper nouns. The unique references of proper nouns include newspapers (19), plural family names (20), plural country names (21), as well as geographical names: seas (22), mountain ranges (23), island groups, and areas, rivers, deserts, and public institutions: hotels, museums (24), libraries, cinemas and theatres (25).

(19) *The* New York Times
(20) *The* Wilsons
(21) *The* Netherlands
(22) *The* Baltic
(23) *The* Himalayas
(24) *The* British Museum
(25) *The* Criterion

Bengali, on the other hand, has no preposed articles but instead a small number of classifiers which are added to nouns to make them definite or indefinite, singular or plural. The same classifiers can be used for different purposes. The use of these classifiers differs according to whether a noun is animate or inanimate, countable or non-countable, ordinary or honorific. Classifiers work together with numbers, quantifiers and, of course, case endings to make up a noun phrase. So this way of marking nouns in Bengali is quite different from what we see in English and it makes the use of the article more complex in Bengali (Thompson 2010:92).
In English, the indefinite article, *a* or *an*, has both generic use and numerical use. For example:

(26) A dog is a useful animal

In (26), the indefinite article, *a*, before the noun, *dog*, has been used generically and at the same time, it has been used numerically instead of one. Corresponding to the English indefinite article, *a* or *an*, in the generic sense no classifier is added to a Bengali noun (Thompson 2010:95). For example

(27) কুকুর একটি উপকারী প্রাণী।
    kukur  ekti  upokaree pranee.
    dog  a   useful   animal

In the English sentence in example (26) the indefinite article, *a*, has been used before the noun, *dog*, to generalize all dogs. But in the Bengali sentence in example (27) nothing equivalent to the English indefinite article, *a*, has been used before the Bengali word, *kukur* (*dog*). But corresponding to the English article, *a* or *an*, in a numeric sense, in Bengali এক/ek/ is used before an adjective phrase (useful animal/ upokaree prani) either with one of the singular classifiers টা/ta/, টি/ti/, জন/jon/, খানা/khana/ and খানন/khani/ or without a classifier (Thompson 2010:97). এক/ek/ is also equivalent to English *one* and *the same* (Thompson 2010:97, 305). A few more examples (28-32) are given below:

(28) এক রাজা ছিল এক বৃদ্ধ লোক
    ek raja silo  ek briddho lok  (no classifier)
    a king there was  an old man

(29) একটা মেয়ে একটা ষাঁড়
    ekta meye  ekta shaar  (/ek+/ta/ classifier)
    A girl  An ox

(30) একটি আপেলে একটি অলিয়েপল
    ekti apel  ekti sele  (/ek+/ti/ classifier)
    An apple  A boy

(31) একজন শিক্ষক একজন অশিক্ষিত লোক
    ekjon shikkhok  ekjon oshikkhito lok  (/ek+/jon/ classifier)
    A teacher  An illiterate person

(32) একখানা চিঠি একখানা গোল
    ekkhana chithi  ekkhana goina  (/ek+/khana/ classifier)
    A letter  An ornament
Among the singular classifiers, টি /ti/ and টা /ta/ are attached to এক /ek/ for any kind of noun. But জন /jon/ goes after এক /ek/ only when the noun designates human beings, whereas খানা /khana/ and খানন /khani/ are mainly used for inanimate, thin, flat, square objects (Thompson 2010:101, 103, 104).

Plural indefinite nouns in Bengali are often without any classifier but for animate nouns plural markers, রা /ra/ with its variants এরা /era/, এরা /eaera/, দের /der/ are used. For example

(33) মেয়েরা = মেয়ে + রা
   meaera = meae + ra
   Girls = girl + s

(34) শিক্ষকেরা = শিক্ষক + এরা
   shikkhokera = shikkhok + era
   Teachers = teacher s

(35) মায়েরা = মা + এরা
   maeera = ma + eaera
   Mothers = mother + s

(36) সেলেরা = সেল + দের
   seleder = sele + der
   Boys = boy + s

In case of the definite article, the is used before any specific noun(s) in English sentences. In contrast, in Bengali, there is no free morpheme corresponding to the English definite article, but instead there are the singular classifiers mentioned above ( টি /ti/, টা /ta/, খানা /khana/ and খানন /khani/) and plural classifiers: এলা /gulo/, এলি /guli/, রা /ra/ or এলা /era/, which are added to nouns to make them definite. Among the plural classifiers, এলা /gulo/ and এলি /guli/ can be used with almost any kind of noun, but mainly the classifiers are used with objects, birds, animals, deictic pronouns, adjectives, abstract things and non-honorifically with human beings to add definiteness and plurality; রা /ra/ or এলা /era/ is only used for human beings. A few examples of definite singular classifiers are given in (37)-(40).

(37) সেলেটি = সেল+টি
   Seleti  Sele+ti
   The boy  boy+the

(38) মেয়েটা = মেয়ে+টা
   Meyeta  Meye+ta
   The girl  girl+the
Some examples of definite plural classifiers are given in (41)-(43).

$$\text{boikhana} = \text{boi+khana}$$
$$\text{book} = \text{book+the}$$

$$\text{kobitakhani} = \text{kobita+khani}$$
$$\text{poem} = \text{poem+the}$$

$$\text{badhagulo} = \text{badha+gulo}$$
$$\text{obstacles} = \text{obstacles+the}$$

$$\text{pakhiguli} = \text{paki+guli}$$
$$\text{birds} = \text{birds+the}$$

$$\text{bicharokra} = \text{bicharok+ra} \text{ or, } \text{bicharok+ra} = \text{bicharok+era}$$
$$\text{judges} = \text{judges+the}$$

Among the singular and plural classifiers, /ta/ is considered the default classifier in Bengali. /-ta/ has two allomorphs /-to/ and /-te/, which are used mainly by the Bengali speakers of India. For example

$$\text{duto} = \text{du+to}$$
$$\text{the two} = \text{two+the}$$

$$\text{chabite} = \text{chabi+te}$$
$$\text{the key} = \text{key+the}$$

There is another classifier, /-tuku/ which is used for mass nouns. /-tuku/ with its variants -tu and -tuk gives a notion of small amount of something. It is separated from the other singular classifiers because it is mainly used with mass nouns and abstract nouns and specifies amount rather than number.

### 3. Methodology

When investigating native language inference on second language acquisition, the primary data should be samples of learner language (Ellis & Berkhuizen 2005:21). Learner language is the spoken or written language produced by learners (Ellis & Berkhuizen 2005:4). The main aim of this research paper is to investigate to what extent there is native language interference in the written production of English in two particular groups of Bangladeshi secondary school going learners. The first school, School A, is a Bengali medium school and
the second school, school B, is an English medium school. The schools are in secondary level and the location of the schools is in the capital city, Dhaka. In the Bengali medium school, the medium of instruction is the native language, Bengali. The school is mostly funded by the government and run by a head teacher along with fellow assistant teachers. The curriculum, syllabus and books are also provided by the government. The English medium school is a private school where the medium of instruction is English and it follows the curriculum of the British examination board, CIE.

3.1 Participants

The total number of participants in the present study was 40. The participants were aged 12 to 14; half of them came from a Bengali medium school and the other half from an English medium school. The number of students was a total of 20 in each class. The participants were all in grade seven and had experienced almost the same number of years of schooling in their primary and secondary level of education in Bangladesh. The participants were all native Bangladeshi who use Bengali as their mother tongue and they studied English as a second/foreign language. The learners from the Bengali medium school studied English as an additional subject in their school curriculum. These learners speak their native language in class, at home and they hardly communicate in English. The learners from the English medium school also studied English as an additional subject but they use only English (except for the Bengali language course) as their medium of instruction in their school. It can therefore be assumed that their English proficiency is better.

3.2 Data

English essays, written by the learners from the two schools, have been used as data in this study. The learners wrote the essays in their classrooms as part of their class work given by their class teachers. The topics were “A rainy day and its impact on city dwellers and villagers” for the Bengali medium learners and “Zoos should be abolished, to what extent do you agree?” for the English medium learners. The teachers from both schools were acquainted with me. After the teachers had collected the essays, they scanned them and sent them to me through e-mail. As the learners were below the age of 15 the teachers asked their parents for permission before the essays were used in this study. The learners wrote the essays by themselves; they did not ask any help from their teachers or use a dictionary. The essays were written by hand. The focus of the investigation was the learners’ use of articles in their English written texts.
3.3 Categorisation of article errors

After the forty essays had been collected, the use of articles by the learners from the two groups was analyzed. The different instances of articles written by the learners were subcategorised with different tags (see 3.3.1-3.3.3). This sub-categorisation of article instances with different tags helped to assess the learners’ use of articles in detail. The learners from the two schools used the definite and indefinite article in their essays and they made some errors of articles along with the correct use of articles in their essays. To understand precisely the proficiency level of article use in English by the participants, the correct and incorrect use of articles in the essays had to be identified. A finer distinction than that between the definite and the indefinite article was needed, and therefore, a first distinction was made between the correct and incorrect use of the definite and indefinite article. Next, a distinction was made between incorrect use of articles and missing articles. In the following sub-sections, the categories used for the indefinite article (3.3.1), the definite article with singular nouns (3.3.2), and the definite article with plural nouns (3.3.3) are presented. The subsections present the abbreviations used in the classification of different article instances and the examples are taken from the learners’ essays (see Appendix, where these abbreviations have been used to mark all articles – or lack of articles).

3.3.1. The indefinite article

On the basis of the learners’ usage of indefinite articles, e.g. correct use, wrong use, omissions, etc., the following sub-categories were identified in the learners’ essays. For assessment, correct indefinite articles instances in the learners’ essays have been tagged IAC (see (46)).

(46) IAC = Indefinite article, correct. E.g. when it rains all day long, it is called a_IAC rainy day.

The tag, IAI was used for three cases. Firstly, when an indefinite article was used where it should not be used, for example, It cause a great harm to us. Secondly, when the indefinite article, a, was used instead of an, for instance, But the village dwellers take it as a enjoyable game. And finally, IAI marks when the indefinite article, an, was used instead of a, such as It has an great effect on people’s life (see (47)).

(47) IAI= Indefinite article, incorrect. E.g. not only that animal are used as a_IAI products.

A third category was used for cases where the students left out the indefinite article, a or an, in their essays and this sort of indefinite article errors was tagged IAM (see (48)).
(48) IAM = Indefinite article, missing. E.g. They do not find A\_IAM rickshaw to go to abroad.

Using the indefinite article instead of the definite article is a fourth type of article error. Such errors were tagged IAD.

(49) IAD= Indefinite article is used instead of the definite article. E.g. After a\_IAD great heat of Summer the rainy day comes.

The tag IAU was used for unclear cases where it was not entirely clear from the context what was meant.

(50) IAU= Indefinite article unclear. E.g. The city dwellers don't have any work and often they pass a\_IAU day without food.

3.3.2 The definite article with singular nouns

In English, the definite article the can be used with a singular noun when the singular noun has a specific reference, and also when it represents the entire group. Based on the usage of the definite article with singular nouns in the learners' essays, the following sub-categories were tagged for the present study. The first category is that of definite article used correctly with singular nouns. This type of article use was tagged as DSC (see (51)).

(51) DSC= Definite article with singular noun, correct. E.g. I actually don't remember the\_DSC name as it was 2 years back.

The second category was when the definite article was missing with singular nouns. Such errors were tagged DSM. In example (52), the definite article has been left out with the noun phrase proper amount which has a post-modifying prepositional phrase, of food.

(52) DSM= Definite article with singular noun, missing. E.g. They don't provide THE\_DSM proper amount of food, no care, no physical activities.

A definite article used in the wrong way with any specific singular noun was tagged as DSI. In the first example in (53), the definite article has been placed before a noun, farming, which is not specific. So using a definite article has been placed before a non-specific noun is wrong. In the second example in (53), the definite article has been placed before the noun

\footnote{When any article is in capital and italic form, it implies missing article}

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pond. But this is the first mention of the pond in the text, so therefore the indefinite article would be preferred.

(53) DSI= Definite article with singular noun, incorrect. E.g. Because it makes the soil soft and suitable for the_DSI farming
Sometimes they are swimming in the_DSI pond

### 3.3.3 The definite article with plural nouns and unclear cases

On the basis of the learners’ use of the definite article in their essays the following sub-categories were identified for the use of the definite article with plural nouns and unclear cases. The correct use of the definite article with plural nouns was tagged DPSC (see (54)).

(54) DPSC= Definite article with plural noun, specific sense, correct. E.g. In some countries, the_DPSC zoos are not properly maintained.

No definite article (also called zero article) with plural nouns in the generic sense was tagged NPGC when usage was correct (see (55)).

(55) NPGC= No definite article with plural nouns in the generic sense. E.g. I agree that NPGC_zoos should be abolished.

A missing definite article with specific plural nouns in the learners’ essays was tagged DPSM. In example (56) the definite article is missing with the specific plural noun, villages.

(56) DPSM= Definite article with plural noun, specific sense, missing. E.g. The children of THE_DPSM villages enjoy this day most.

Cases where the definite article was used with generic plural nouns were marked DPGI. In (57) there is an example of the definite article being used with the generic noun city dwellers. This sort of error was tagged DPGI.

(57) DPGI= Definite article with plural noun, generic sense, incorrect. E.g. It is a great suffering for all the_DPGI city dwellers.

Errors where the definite article was used with unclear references were marked DAU. Example (58) shows the definite article being used before a noun, home. That means that the
home is specified. But it is not clear from the context whether this refers to a specific home. So such usage of the definite article is unclear and tagged DAU.

(58) DAU= Definite article with unclear cases. E.g. In a city town, people can not wait and sit in the DAU home because, they have worked. So, they left the DAU home and go to their respective places.

3.3.4 Interference errors
In section 2.4.1, it was explained that Bengali has no indefinite article in the generic sense and no definite article at all. Mistakes regarding the use of indefinite articles in the generic sense and definite articles where they should have been used can therefore be attributed to the students’ native language. So errors where the indefinite and definite articles are missing have been taken to show native language inference. A few examples of such cases are given in examples (59) - (61), (65) and (72-74).

(59) Most of the children of city can’t take the enjoyment of a rainy day. (Indefinite article, a, missing)

(60) Zoo is a place where different types of animals are kept in cages. (Indefinite article, a, missing)

(61) The animals might become ill due to living in such environment. (Indefinite article, an, missing)

Examples (59), (60) and (61) illustrate that the indefinite article a and an were omitted before the three nouns, city, zoo and environment. According to the grammatical rules of English, the indefinite article a or an should be used before the three generic countable singular nouns, city, zoo and environment. However, Bengali speakers are not accustomed to using a corresponding article before any generic singular countable noun in their native language. If the phrases most of the children and such an environment and the clause, a zoo is a place, ae translated into Bengali it would be as in (62) - (64).

(62) Most of the children of a city শহরের বেশিরভাগ বাচ্চারা city-GEN most of children

(63) A zoo is a place চিড়িয়াখানা একটা জাগুলা zoo a place

(64) Such an environment এমন পরিবেশ such environment
From the translations of the Bengali sentences, it can be seen that no indefinite article is used before any generic singular countable Bengali noun. Consequently, this feature of the learners’ native language tends to transfer to the learners’ second language. Hence, the Bangladeshi learners who study English as their second language often omit the indefinite article *a* before any generic singular countable noun and here this is ascribed to native language interference.

(65) But the village dwellers take it as a enjoyable game.
(Indefinite article, *an*, instead of *a*; School A, learner 2)

Example (65) shows a case where the indefinite article *a* is used instead of *an*, before the noun phrase *enjoyable game*. In English the indefinite article *a* has a variant, *an*, depending on whether the noun or noun phrase begins with a vowel sound or not. In Bengali only one word, */ek/* (with a classifier: *-ti*, *-ta*, *-khana* or *-khani*), is used for the equivalent indefinite article in a numeric sense. So Bangladeshi learners often tend to use *a* instead of *an* in English sentences as they do not use any alternative of */ek/* in their native language, Bengali. Two examples of noun phrases are given below in (66) – (67).

(66) An enjoyable game
    একটি উপযোগী খেলা
    ekti upovoggo khela

(67) A pleasant game
    একটি উপযোগী খেলা
    ekti mojar khela

From examples (66) and (67), it is clearly seen that two forms of the indefinite article are used in English but only one is used in Bengali. Therefore, Bangladeshi learners of English may forget to use *an* instead of *a* while writing in English.

(68) A rainy day means _ sky overcast with black clouds.
(Definite article, *the*, missing)

(69) In _ zoo, animals get treatment if they are sick.
(Definite article, *the*, missing)

(70) Most of _ people enjoy this season.
(Definite article, *the*, missing before plural noun)

(71) So, the negative parts are more important than _ positive parts.
(Definite article, *the*, missing before plural noun)
In examples (68) - (71) the definite article *the* has been left out before two specific singular and two specific plural nouns. According to the grammatical rules of English articles, the definite article, *the*, is used before any specific noun or unique noun but in Bengali no free morpheme corresponding to the English definite article, *the*, is used before any specific or unique noun. As a result, Bangladeshi learners of English tend to leave out the definite article in English, which is here taken as a sign of native language interference. If the sentences are translated into Bengali the absence of the definite article in Bengali will be visible (see (72) – (74)).

(72) A rainy day means *THE_DSM* sky overcast with black clouds.
    একটা বৃষ্টির দিন মানে ঢাকা আকাশ।
    a rainy-GEN day means cloud-GEN overcast sky

(73) Most of *THE_DPSM* people enjoy this season.
    বেশিরভাগ লোকেরা এই ঋতুটা উপযোগ করে।
    most of people this season-CL enjoy do

(74) In *THE_DSM* zoo, animals get treatment if they are sick.
    চিকিৎসাগারে প্রাণীরা লেবাপা পায় যদি তারা অসুস্থ হয়।
    zoo-LOC animals treatment get if they sick are

So, from the errors mentioned above, it can be said that the learners from both schools display signs of native language interference when they write in English and the instances of missing definite (DSM, DPSM) and indefinite articles (IAM) in the learners’ essays can be considered signs of native language interference.

### 3.3.5 Non-interference errors

As second language learners of English, Bengali learners have been taught the rules of article use in English in their schools. They must have learned rules like: using *the* for the definite article in English; using *an* (before any noun starting with a vowel sound) instead of *a* for the indefinite article in English. There is no equivalent of *the* in Bengali grammar for definite article and no alternative for *a* *e.g.* *an* if any Bengali noun starts with vowel sound. So when these articles are used incorrectly, the errors are due to lack of grammatical knowledge or lack of concentration rather than native language interference. Some examples from the learners’ essays are given below.

(75) After a great heat of summer the rainy day comes.
    (Indefinite article, instead of definite article)

Example (75) shows the indefinite article *a* being used instead of the definite article, *the*, before the noun phrase, *great heat of summer*. According to the rules of articles in English,
prepositional post modification by an of-phrase usually requires the definite article with a head noun. So the definite article, the, should be used with the noun phrase, great heat of summer, instead of the indefinite article, a. In this case, it is clear that the error is due to a lack of grammatical knowledge of articles in English as there is no such rule for articles in Bengali.

(76) ...many impact on a city dwellers and villagers. (Indefinite article incorrect)

(77) Not only that animals are used as a products. (Indefinite article, incorrect)

Examples (76) and (77) illustrate how the indefinite article is used incorrectly. The indefinite article, a, is placed before the two plural nouns, city dwellers and products. No indefinite article can be used before a plural noun either in English or in Bengali. So it must be assumed that surely errors are made either because of lack of grammatical knowledge or carelessness.

(78) They don’t know what to do in the rainy day. (Definite article, instead of indefinite article)

(79) People can make safari park rather than zoo because in safari parks animals are not inside the cage. (Definite article, instead of indefinite article)

Examples (78) and (79) show the use of the definite article with two unspecified singular nouns. According to the rules of article use in English, there should be indefinite articles before these two singular nouns. In Bengali, either an indefinite article or a zero article is applicable for such cases. So the errors in the examples (78) and (79) must be attributed to the learners’ lack of grammatical knowledge.

(80) It’s a day of great enjoy to the students. (Definite article, incorrect before plural nouns in the generic sense)

(81) Most country have zoos so that the people can know about the animals. (Definite article, incorrect before plural nouns in generic sense)

Examples (80) and (81), finally, show cases where the definite article is used before plural nouns in the generic sense. The definite article is placed before the plural nouns, students and people, but students and people in those sentences do not refer to any specific group of students or people. There should be a zero article before such plural nouns both in Bengali and English. So the use of the definite article with generic plural nouns represents a grammatical error.
Based on the categorisation above, it is evident that Bangladeshi learners can make non-interference errors as well as native language interference errors. The use of the indefinite article instead of the definite article (IAD), the use of incorrect indefinite articles (IAI) and the use of incorrect definite articles with singular and plural nouns (DSI, DPGI) in the learners’ essays can be regarded as non-interference errors.

3.4 Chi-square Test

A chi-square test is a statistical test and it is used to see if there is a relationship between two categorical variables. The investigation of native language interference in the use of English articles by Bangladeshi students provides categorical variables from two different populations. Additionally, the essays written by the learners from School B were longer on average; hence, a statistical test is needed which can adjust for the differences in average length between the two groups of informants. Hence, in order to test whether the use of the definite article differs significantly in the two groups of learners a chi-square test was applied.

As an example, the figures from the results of the learners’ use of the indefinite article will be presented in section 4.2.1. The difference between the ratio of correct and incorrect use of the indefinite article of the two groups looks alike. So a significance test can be done to check whether the difference between the two groups is significant or not.

4. Results

This section presents the data and the findings based on the research questions as stated in the aim of this essay. When the different instances of articles used by the learners from the two schools are analyzed it is evident that the participating students from both schools tend to make similar errors, although with some variation between the groups. The results are presented in sections 4.2.1-4.2.3 in the same order as in the methods section (indefinite article errors, definite article errors with singular and plural nouns, no definite article with plural nouns in the generic sense, interference and non-interference errors).

4.1 Overall comparison of essays

As shown in Table 2, the essays written by the learners from the English medium school (School B) are longer on average than the essays written by the learners from the Bengali medium school (School A). The 20 learners from School A wrote in total 3,855 words in their essays. The average number of words per essay by the learners from School A is 193. On the
other hand, the 20 learners from School B wrote in total 5,560 words. The average number of words per essay by the learners from School B is 278.

Table 2: The number of words in the learners’ essays.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Maximum no. of words</th>
<th>Minimum no. of words</th>
<th>Average number of words</th>
<th>Total number of words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>3,855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>646</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>5,560</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Article-related errors
As Table 3 shows, the total number of articles in the essays written by the learners from school A is 537. Here it needs to be noted that the zero article and missing articles have also been included in the count. Out of 537 instances, the learners from school A made 113 article errors. In comparison, the total number of articles found in the essays written by the learners from school B is 744. Out of 744 instances, the learners from school B made 99 errors. There were also some unclear cases (see e.g. section 3.3.1 and 3.3.3). In the essays from school A, there were 14 unclear cases, compared to 18 in the essays from school B. Table 4 shows the total number of articles, the number of correct and incorrect articles and unclear article cases by the two groups of learners.

Table 3: The total number of articles (including zero articles and missing articles) and errors in article usage made by the learners from two schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Total number of articles</th>
<th>Total number of correct articles</th>
<th>Total number of incorrect articles</th>
<th>Total number of unclear cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>744</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The use of articles in English is quite challenging for Bangladeshi English learners as explained in section 2.4. To facilitate the analysis of the usage of articles by the learners, their correct use of articles and article errors were tagged using the subcategories that were presented in section 3.3. A survey of their overall performance of using articles in English is given in the Appendix.

### 4.2.1. The indefinite article

The data given in Table 4 compares the use of indefinite articles among the two groups of students. It compares the data from school A and school B on the correct use of indefinite articles (IAC), missing indefinite articles (IAM), incorrect indefinite articles (IAI), indefinite article used instead of a definite article (IAD) as well as unclear cases of the indefinite article (IAU).

Table 4: The total number of indefinite article instances and errors in indefinite article usage made by the learners from two schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IAC N</td>
<td>IAM N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>73</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>68</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of the indefinite articles in the learners’ essays were correct. The learners from school A used a total of 170 indefinite articles whereas the learners from school B used a total of 160 indefinite articles in their essays. Here, one thing is noticeable, namely that the learners from school A wrote shorter essays, on average, than the learners from school B, and at the same time the learners from school A used more indefinite articles in their essays than the learners from school B. The learners from school A got 124 indefinite articles correct out of a total of 170 indefinite article instances. On the other hand, the learners from school B got 109 indefinite articles correct out of altogether 160. This translates to 73% correct use of indefinite articles for school A and 68% for school B. So the data in Table 5 show that the learners from school A not only used more indefinite articles, but also used them more accurately than the learners from school B.

The most frequent error for both groups of learners was a missing indefinite article (IAM). The learners from school A left out the indefinite article 34 times which is 20% of the time
when an indefinite article was required. On the other hand, the learners from school B left out the indefinite article 43 times, which covers 27% of their indefinite article usage. The number of incorrect indefinite articles (IAI) made by the students from school A was 6 whereas the learners from school B made 4. The number of unclear instances of indefinite article (IAU) use is 4 in both groups. The percentage of unclear indefinite article use is 2% and 2.5% respectively for students from school A and school B. Finally, the learners from school A used the definite article instead of the indefinite article (IAD) only 2 times. No learner from school B made this type of error.

In terms of using the indefinite article, the learners from both schools scored almost the same and a chi-square test can justify if the differences between their results were significant or not. The key idea of the Chi-square test is a comparison of observed and expected values. The observed and expected numbers of correct and incorrect use of the indefinite article by the learners from two schools are given in Table 5.

Table 5: The observed and expected numbers of correct and incorrect use of the indefinite article by the learners from two schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Correct use</th>
<th>Incorrect use</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>Observed (124)</td>
<td>Observed (46)</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected (120.03)</td>
<td>Expected (49.97)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>Observed (109)</td>
<td>Observed (51)</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected (112.97)</td>
<td>Expected (47.03)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The null hypothesis (H₀) states that there is no significant difference between the frequencies from the two groups of students. The alternative hypothesis (H₁) states that the difference is significant. The level of significance is set at 0.05 (the standard for most studies in social sciences). The Chi-square formula used on these data is

\[ X^2 = \sum \frac{(\text{Observed Frequency} - \text{Expected Frequency})^2}{\text{Expected Frequency}} \]

\[ = \frac{(124-120.03)^2}{120.03} + \frac{(46-49.97)^2}{49.97} + \frac{(109-112.97)^2}{112.97} + \frac{(51-47.03)^2}{47.03} \]

\[ = 0.92 \]

Using the Chi-square statistic formula with the values in the table above gives a value of 0.92. Using degrees of freedom and significance levels, it can be decided whether the null hypothesis (H₀) is accepted or rejected. For this study, the degree of freedom is calculated as (r-1) (c-1) = (2-1) (2-1) = 1, where r means row and c means column. The critical value of Chi-squared at 5% significance and 1 degree of freedom is 3.84. The calculated value is 0.92.
The calculated value is smaller than the critical value at the 5% level of probability. So the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, which means there is not a significant difference between the results at the 5 percent level of probability. The reason for this might be that the indefinite article is relatively easy for learners from Bangladesh.

4.2.2 The definite article with singular nouns
Evaluating the learners on the use of the definite article with singular nouns gives the numbers presented in Table 6. DSC is the statistic of correct usage of the definite article with a singular noun, DSM is the number of missing definite articles with a singular noun, and DSI is the number of incorrect uses of the definite article with a singular noun.

Table 6: The number of definite articles and errors with singular nouns by the learners from two schools. (Chi-square for correct vs. incorrect and unclear cases=3.86, df=1, p<0.05)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>DSC</td>
<td>DSM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The learners from school A and school B used the definite article with singular nouns 165 (31% of all articles) and 155 (20% of all articles) times respectively in their essays (see Table 6). The learners from school A used more definite articles than the learners from school B. In most cases, the learners from both schools used the definite article with singular nouns correctly. The learners from school A used the definite article correctly 112 times (68% of all definite articles with singular nouns), while on the other hand, the learners from school B used the definite article correctly 120 times (77% of all definite articles with singular nouns). The most common error in both groups of learners was a missing definite article with singular nouns (DSM). The learners from the two schools left out the definite article before singular nouns with both unique reference and specific reference. The learners from school A left out the definite article with singular nouns 44 times which is 27% of their total definite article usage with singular nouns. On the other hand, the learners from school B left out the definite article with singular nouns 25 times which comprises 16% of their total definite article usage with singular nouns. The learners from both schools also used incorrect articles with singular nouns and they had a similar number of incorrect definite articles with singular nouns. The learners from school A used 9 (5%) definite articles incorrectly with singular
nouns whereas the learners from school B used 10 (7%) definite articles incorrectly with singular nouns.

After calculating the chi-square for the data given in Table 6, the chi-square value was: 3.86. This chi-square value shows that the difference between the two groups of students is significant. So the students from school B were more proficient in using the definite article with singular nouns in English than the students from school A.

4.2.3 The definite article and zero article with plural nouns
An examination of the use of the zero article and definite article with plural nouns yielded the results displayed in Table 7. DPSC stands for correct definite articles with a plural noun and specific sense and NPGC is the value for correct use of the zero article with plural nouns in a generic sense. DPGI represents incorrect use of the definite article with plural nouns in a generic sense. DPSM is a missing definite article with a plural noun with specific sense.

Table 7: The number of the zero article, definite article and errors with plural nouns by the learners from two schools. (Chi-square for correct vs. incorrect and unclear cases=10.10, df=1, p<0.05)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>DPSC</td>
<td>NPGC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N   %</td>
<td>N   %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>86 44</td>
<td>88 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>116 28</td>
<td>282 68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 7 shows, in most of the cases, the learners from the two schools used the definite article with plural nouns correctly. The learners from school A used a total of 195 definite and zero articles with plural nouns in their essays and altogether 174 (89%) of these were correct. The learners from school B, on the other hand, wrote a total of 415 definite and zero articles with plural nouns and altogether 398 (96%) of these were correct.

So from the data given in Table 7 it can be seen that the learners from school B used more definite articles with plural nouns and a bit more precisely than the learners from school A. The most frequent definite article error with plural nouns for both groups of learners was using the definite article with generic nouns. Two examples are The students suffer greatly in this day, But many people says that the zoos are a good source of education. The plural noun students in the first example did not refer to any particular group of students, so using
the definite article here is wrong. The plural noun, *zoos* in the second example refers to all zoos and not any particular group of zoos, so here the zero article should be used. The learners from school A used the definite article incorrectly with plural nouns 12 times which is 6% of their total errors with plural nouns. On the other hand, the learners from school B used the definite article incorrectly with plural nouns 16 times which makes up 4% of their total use of definite or zero article with plural nouns.

Based on the chi-square value (see the legend of Table 7) it can be said that the difference between the two groups of students is significant. The students from school B are more proficient in article use with plural nouns than the students from school A.

### 4.3 Native language interference

In section 3.3.4 of this essay, some error categories were discussed and it was explained how the errors relate to interference from the learners’ native language, Bengali. In line with this discussion, several instances of article errors, namely indefinite article missing (IAM), definite article missing with singular nouns (DSM) and definite article missing with plural nouns (DPSM) were marked as interference errors. Although the learners from School B wrote more words in their essays, the learners from school A made a total of 87 interference errors in their essays while the learners from school B made a total of 69 interference errors in their essays (see Table 8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>IAM</th>
<th>DSM</th>
<th>DPSM</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the data given in Table 8 it can be seen that the learners from school A made the largest number of interference errors (44 which is 51%) when they left out the definite article with singular nouns while the interference errors in the essays written by the learners from school B were mainly omission of the indefinite article (43 which is 62%). There is some interference in the use of noun forms for both learner groups. The main difference shown in Table 8 is that learners from school B left out they left out the indefinite article comparatively more often (IAM), whereas the students from school B instead left out the definite article with singular nouns (DSM). Neither group showed many interference errors when it comes to the use of the definite article with plural nouns (DPSM).
4.4 Non-interference

In section 3.3.5, other examples of errors from the learners’ essays were mentioned and it was explained how the errors relate to the learners’ insufficient grammatical knowledge. The following instances of article use were marked as non-interference errors: the use of the indefinite article instead of the definite article (IAD), incorrect indefinite article (IAI), incorrect definite article with singular nouns (DSI) and incorrect definite article with plural nouns (DPGI) were marked as non-interference errors. The learners from school A made a total of 29 non-interference errors in their essays while the learners from school B made a total of 30 non-interference errors (see Table 9).

Table 9: The number of non-interference errors by the learners from two schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Non- interference errors</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IAI N %</td>
<td>IAD N %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>6 21</td>
<td>2 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>4 13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the data given in Table 9 it can be seen that the learners from both schools made their maximum number of non-interference errors (12 and 16 respectively) by using incorrectly the definite article with plural nouns in their essays. One conclusion that could be drawn is hence that the learners tend to make more non-interference errors with the definite article before the plural rather than before singular nouns. Considering that the essays written by the learners in School B were on average much longer than the essays written by the learners in School A, these results indicate that the number of non-interference errors was lower for the pupils from School B.

4.5 Comparison between the learners’ interference and non-interference errors

The students from both schools made errors in the use of the English definite and indefinite articles and the errors were ascribed to either native language interference or non-interference. A graphical presentation of the learners’ performance from the two schools is given in Table 10.
Table 10: The number of interference and non-interference errors by the learners from two schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Total no. of article related errors</th>
<th>Interference errors</th>
<th>Non-interference errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools A</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>87 75%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools B</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>69 70%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 10, it can be seen that both learner groups made more interference errors than non-interference errors in their essays. Another notable thing is number of errors comparing to number of words in the learners’ essays. From Table 2 it is already known that School B learners wrote longer texts and thus had more opportunities to make errors. Nevertheless, the learners from school A made a total of 87 native language interference errors out of a total of 116 article errors. They made 75% interference errors and the remaining 25% were non-interference errors. On the other hand, the learners from school B made a total of 70 native language interference errors out of a total of 99 article errors. They made 70% interference errors and the remaining 30% were non-interference errors.

5. Summary and conclusion

Any language acquired after the native language is called a second language and people acquire a second language through different types of schooling and learning processes. Making errors is an inevitable phenomenon in any sort of learning. So those who learn English as a second language make errors and the learners from Bangladesh are not exceptional in this regard. The aim of this essay was to investigate whether native language interference occurs in Bangladeshi students’ use of English articles in their written English essays and whether there is a difference between the students from two different types of schools. The method that was used for this study was to collect essays from students in grade seven at a Bengali medium school and an English medium school, which provided a general picture of different kinds of errors in the use of English articles. After identifying the use of English articles in the essays written by the students from the two schools, different types of article errors were marked and classified. The numbers of article errors made by the two groups of learners were compared and it was found that the results were very similar but the learners from School B wrote more words in their essays. To be more precise, the results were checked for significance by means of a chi-square goodness of fit test. From the chi-square test, the difference between the learners’ results in the use of English indefinite articles proved insignificant. But when they used the definite article with singular and plural
nouns the learners differed. The learners from the English medium school made fewer errors than the learners from the Bengali medium school and through the chi-square test it was found that the differences between the results were significant. Later, the statistics of native language interference errors and non-interference errors made by the learners from the two different schools showed that the learners from school B (English medium school) made fewer interference errors than the learners from school A (Bengali medium school). In conclusion, it can be said that the Bangladeshi EFL learners are influenced by their native language while using English articles in their English essays and the learners from the English medium school are a little better users of English articles especially regarding the definite article, than the learners from the Bengali medium school.

This study was only limited to finding out whether native language interference can be identified in Bangladeshi learners’ use of English articles in their essays and to what extent the learners’ mastery of English articles can be attributed to the type of school they attend. Further studies are needed to determine e.g. what teaching and learning strategies may help to improve the learners’ proficiency in the use of English articles.
References


## Appendix

### Bengali medium learners’ data on using articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School A</th>
<th>Total article</th>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
<th>IAC</th>
<th>IAM</th>
<th>IA</th>
<th>IA</th>
<th>IA</th>
<th>IA</th>
<th>DSC</th>
<th>DSM</th>
<th>DSI</th>
<th>DPS</th>
<th>ND</th>
<th>DPG</th>
<th>DPGA</th>
<th>DA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Student 4</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Student 6</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student 8</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student 10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>29</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Student 12</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 13</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Student 15</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 16</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Student 17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 18</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>113</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## English medium learners’ data on using articles

### School B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total article</th>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
<th>IAC</th>
<th>IAM</th>
<th>IA</th>
<th>IAM</th>
<th>IAU</th>
<th>DSC</th>
<th>DSM</th>
<th>DSI</th>
<th>DPS</th>
<th>ND</th>
<th>DPG</th>
<th>DPSM</th>
<th>DA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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### Overall performance of using articles in English by both groups of learners in their essays

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